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14. ABSTRACT History chastises Japan for its violent and antagonistic imperialism throughout the early and mid-20th centuries; levying upon it sole responsibility for the callous waste of life, property, and sovereignty. With little comprehension of what drove a modern, industrialized nation to such radical extremes, it is commonly assumed that Imperial Japan was simply focused on acquiring material resources and territory to fuel its militarism and ambitions of dominating the Far East. Less frequently respected and analyzed were the threats to its national identity; access to equal economic privilege; ability to provide basic resources for its exploding population; and the right to peaceful expansion. To the Imperial Japanese Government, these were not simply means to a better, more prosperous nation. Dominance in these domains was essential to existence; loss of them was as an existential hazard. Rationalizing Imperial Japan's seemingly irrational decision to thrust itself into perpetual conflict can be accomplished by the application of particular biological and social science theories; namely the Inclusive Fitness Logic and Adaptive Infrastructure. Analysis through these lenses shows the simplicity and inevitability of Imperial Japan's adoption of extreme nationalism and aggression.					
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*United States Marine Corps
Command and Staff College
Marine Corps University
2076 South Street
Marine Corps Combat Development Command
Quantico, Virginia 22134-5068*

MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

**THE SANITY OF IMPERIAL JAPAN:
HOW THE THREAT OF EXTINCTION SIMPLIFIES THE DECISION FOR
WAR**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

MAJOR CHRISTOPHER D. TOLLIVER

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Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member:

Charles D. Kethava, Ph.D.

Approved: _____

Date: 22 MARCH 2013

Oral Defense Committee Member: *Craig Swanson, Ph.D.*

Approved: *[Signature]*

Date: 22 March 2013

Executive Summary

Title: The Sanity of Imperial Japan: How the Threat of Extinction Simplifies the Decision for War

Author: Major Christopher D. Tolliver, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: Rationalizing Imperial Japan's seemingly irrational decision to thrust itself into perpetual conflict can be accomplished by the application of particular biological and social science theories; namely the Inclusive Fitness Logic and Adaptive Infrastructure.

Discussion: History chastises Japan for its violent and antagonistic imperialism throughout the early and mid-20th centuries; levying upon it sole responsibility for the callous waste of life, property, and sovereignty. With little comprehension of what drove a modern, industrialized nation to such radical extremes, it is commonly assumed that Imperial Japan was simply focused on acquiring material resources and territory to fuel its militarism and ambitions of dominating the Far East. Less frequently respected and analyzed were the threats to its national identity; access to equal economic privilege; ability to provide basic resources for its exploding population; and the right to peaceful expansion. To the Imperial Japanese Government, these were not simply means to a better, more prosperous nation. Dominance in these domains was essential to existence; loss of them was as an existential hazard. Rationalizing Imperial Japan's seemingly irrational decision to thrust itself into perpetual conflict can be accomplished by the application of particular biological and social science theories; namely the Inclusive Fitness Logic and Adaptive Infrastructure. Analysis through these lenses shows the simplicity and inevitability of Imperial Japan's adoption of extreme nationalism and aggression.

Modern-day strategists could easily dismiss this study as a historical anomaly whose replication is easily recognized and avoided. Advanced monitoring technologies and extensive global alliances would arguably prevent a similar level of escalation and surprise as witnessed in December 1941. This would be accurate if one was narrowly searching for the same geopolitical paradigm as Imperial Japan found itself in during the first half of the twentieth century. Several comparable situations currently exist where the desperation experienced from increased economic and political isolation could thrust a nation towards seemingly irrational confrontation. A brief study of the Islamic Republic of Iran illustrates some parallels with Imperial Japan as it poses a considerable military and economic threat to the Middle East and beyond.

Conclusion: As the window for global concessions closes and the economic noose tightens around ostracized nations, it is not without reason or precedent that a seemingly nonsensical, catastrophic option may be deemed as the only logical means for securing a desired future.

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Preface

All too often, I have been led to believe that Imperial Japan's intention of regional domination and hunger for power brought on the Pacific War with the United States in 1941. This explanation never satisfied me. I believed that, despite the viciousness and ferocity of its military, there had to be a logical explanation to Imperial Japan's decision to embark on such aggressive actions in Asia and then against the Allied Powers. I was surprised to learn that not only were they acting out of desperation, there was scientific logic to substantiate it.

This study is not meant to be a predictive formula. As planners and thinkers, we should always be suspicious of categories. It is intended to illustrate that what is perceived and labeled as irrational can be quite logical. Accepting this should encourage us to explore current and potential threats with greater depth and open-mindedness.

I am profoundly grateful to my MMS mentor, Dr. Charles D. McKenna, Ph.D. He allowed gave me considerable freedom to explore several distinctly different topics before finally settling. His patience, guidance, and willingness to provide me access to personal professional contacts was truly remarkable and greatly appreciated.

I am also extremely grateful to Dr. Pauletta Otis, Ph.D. My final thesis is directly attributed to a chance conversation we had during a Command and Staff College social function. Her genuine interest in my MMS progress and willingness to do some creative free-thinking broadened my perspectives and challenged me to do something different.

I am equally indebted to my Conference Group leadership; Lieutenant Colonel Farrell Sullivan and Dr. Robert Bruce, Ph.D. This exclusive combination of warrior, scholar,

and gentleman has had a profound and enduring impact on my life as a Marine officer and intellectual. I will draw upon their lessons and examples for the remainder of my life.

Most importantly, I am humbled by my wife's strength and love for our family. She accepts every challenge I face as if it were her own and gives me the time, encouragement, and support I need to succeed. She and my son are the motivation for all my achievements.

History chastises Japan for its violent and antagonistic imperialism throughout the early and mid-20th centuries; levying upon it sole responsibility for the callous waste of life, property, and sovereignty. With little comprehension of what drove a modern, industrialized nation to such radical extremes, it is commonly assumed that Imperial Japan was simply focused on acquiring material resources and territory to fuel its militarism and ambitions of dominating the Far East. Less frequently respected and analyzed were the threats to its national identity; access to equal economic privilege; ability to provide basic resources for its exploding population; and the right to peaceful expansion. To the Imperial Japanese Government, these were not simply means to a better, more prosperous nation. Dominance in these domains was essential to existence; loss of them was as an existential hazard. Rationalizing Imperial Japan's seemingly irrational decision to thrust itself into perpetual conflict can be accomplished by the application of particular biological and social science theories; namely the Inclusive Fitness Logic and Adaptive Infrastructure. Analysis through these lenses shows the simplicity and inevitability of Imperial Japan's adoption of extreme nationalism and aggression. Before examining Japan's decision-making process with scientific and psychological rigor, however, a thorough understanding of Japan's social, political, economic, and ideological station leading up to its fateful decision for war must be understood.

When Japan's two and a half centuries of isolation were shattered in 1853 by the veiled threat of United States military power, an unprecedented sociopolitical revolution soon followed. Confronted with the intrusion of western interests, influence, and technological superiority, Japan quickly realized it would be at the West's mercy without rapid and efficient modernization and expansion. The Meiji Restoration sought to build the nation's strength through tightly controlled Westernization and national mobilization while protecting its culture and traditions.

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Japan perceived its national maturation hindered by the interests of other world powers; primarily the Occidentals of Great Britain and the United States. Of great concern and a formidable obstacle in Asia was the widespread use of ‘unequal treaties.’ Used to colonize Hong Kong after the First Opium War (1839-42) and open Japan to trading in 1853, they became far more prevalent early in the 20th century to secure commercial rites, cede territory or pay reparations due to military defeat or by the simple threat of force.¹ This practice was most commonly used in China where, after World War I, Western powers were looking to develop spheres of influence and expand global markets and global reach.

Despite these restrictive practices, between the 1868 Japanese Revolution to the Paris Peace Conference at the end of World War I, Japan had ascended to a world power. As one of the four principal signatories to the Versailles Treaty of 28 June 1919, Japan reaped extensive benefits without suffering the bloody, economic calamity of the European powers. Germany’s defeat and near subjugation eliminated them as a military and political opponent in the Far East and with the transfer of the Chinese province of Shangtung, Japan believed they were on the verge of an era of unprecedented prosperity. This moment, when the answers to the Japanese problem of modernization had just been eloquently presented, turned out to be the nation’s zenith; a point from which Japan would face unrelenting, covert and overt aggression, propelling them towards an ultimate collapse.²

Feeding the revolution required territory and by the late 1920’s Japan had either occupied, annexed, or been ceded (under the guise of the a League of Nations mandate) Formosa, Korea, southern Karafuto (an island annexed from Russia after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 that lies immediately north of the Japanese Isles), parts of Manchuria, and the Pacific Mariana, Palau, Caroline, and Marshall island groups. Despite the diminutive size of

these acquisitions – Korea, Taiwan and Karafuto being only four-fifths the size of the Japanese main islands – they were strategically important for two reasons. First, taken in their entirety, they formed a shallow yet respectable defensive zone that allowed some depth. Likewise, they provided Japan a means to project military and economic power to other portions of Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Second, they provided markets for Japanese industrial and consumer products, food supplies, and raw materials.³ Although colonies impart particular legitimacy and prestige to an emerging world power, their strategic economic implications far exceeded the enthusiasm of military planners.

Between 1910-14, Taiwan, Korea, and Manchuria absorbed one-sixth of Japan's exports; increasing to more than one-fifth between 1925-29. During these same periods, imports from these areas increased from fourteen percent to twenty-five percent. As consumers, their chief imports were cotton products and consumer goods. More importantly, these areas represented Japan's breadbasket, providing nearly all of its food supplies: Manchurian soy beans and millet, Korean rice, and Taiwanese rice and sugar.⁴ They were indispensable to sustaining Japan's population boom, enabling economic and political stability.

In the twenty years after Commodore Perry's forcible intrusion into Tokyo Bay (approximately 1873), the population of Japan was a manageable 31 million.⁵ Due in large part to Meiji population initiatives and Western hygiene standards, the population exploded to 55.1 million by 1913, and then to 62.4 million by the end of 1929. Between the years of 1935-40, the population continued to rise at a net rate of 5.6 percent, reaching nearly 73 million.⁶ The four main islands that comprise Japan (Hokkaido, Honshu, Kyushu and Shikoku) were barely the size of California and the national economy could not absorb the growth of nearly one million people per year and the ultimate risk of national starvation that accompanied it.⁷

Not long after The Great War, global sentiment pressed for disarmament and measures aimed at preventing another massive arms build-up. Conceived by President Warren G. Harding, the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-1922 called upon nine nations (United States, Belgium, Great Britain, China, France, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, and Portugal) to preserve peace through negotiated force reductions and limitations.⁸ Coincidentally, all nine nations had vested interests in the Pacific Ocean and East Asia. Advertised as a means for balancing global security responsibilities and maintaining a favorable balance of power in Eastern Asia (i.e., favorable for Western powers), the Washington Naval Conference was considered by Japan to be a direct assault on its anticipated regional hegemony. Based on the premise that Japan's geographic position amongst historical enemies inclined it to a predominately defensive posture, Japan reluctantly accepted an agreement that established a battleship and aircraft carrier force ratio between the United States, Great Britain, and itself of 5:5:3. Anglo justification centered on "equality of security" rather than Japan's preferred position of "equality of armaments."⁹

Skepticism pervaded the Japanese government as to the true intentions of the Western powers; a counterbalance to Asia as forces and attention were pulled away from Europe. Although negotiators straddled some acute tension between the United States and Japan, many in Japan believed they had yielded everything and gained nothing. Diplomatically, Japan was aware the West perceived her actions in China negatively and that she needed to avoid a naval armament race with the United States. Most importantly, however, Japan, at this juncture, had to avoid any actions that could threaten the flow of American materials fundamental to national survival.¹⁰

Long before the Great War, however, the United States recognized the intentions world powers had in China as well as its commercial potential. Knowing she was too late to prevent

the creation of spheres of influence (and de facto political authority), United States Secretary of State John Hay proposed the Open Door Policy for China. Originally published in September 1899, Hay called for equal commercial opportunities and rights for all nations in China. Additionally, he advocated support for China's territorial integrity, although not to the extent of using force to prevent partition.¹¹ Despite limited initial support, the principles survived. Bolstered largely by the signing of the Nine-Power Treaty on 6 February 1922 (as part of the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-22), the Open Door Policy united these nations to "respect China's sovereignty, independence, and 'administrative integrity.'" They were also to reject spheres of influence and "observe the principle of 'equal opportunity for the commerce and industry of all nations' in China."¹²

Although the Japanese signed the Nine-Power Treaty, it proved to be one of many injustices aimed to protect China from Japan, and protect Western ambitions. The Japanese viewed these Western achievements with the sense that the "Far East" was being marginalized to a commercial and financial hub that did not embrace them as an equal partner with like interests and needs. It was an irony not lost on Japan that just as they emerged as a world power and were "getting really skillful at the game of grab, the other Powers, most of whom had all they wanted anyway, suddenly had an excess of virtue and called the game off."¹³

Having managed to play a largely conciliatory role throughout the 1920s, Japan realized by 1931 that continuation of this diplomatic policy would not achieve the territory, resources, and markets necessary to sustain growth and development. With the Soviet Union's build-up of military power on the Manchurian border and rising Chinese nationalism (which looked to incorporate Manchuria into China), Japan grew very concerned about its substantial, and vital investments. As a potential long-term source of extremely important and desperately needed raw

materials, Japan found itself at a crossroads. Would it maintain the status quo and remain within the scope of Occidental rules and diplomacy or would it ascend to its desired position of unifier and leader of East Asia? On 19 September 1931, the question was resolved when Kwantung Army officers, invoking the right to “self defense” and the need to secure Japanese rights and interests, seized Manchuria with military forces. Despite the Emperor and War Ministry’s refusal to sanction the aggression, strong military and popular pressure eventually forced the Imperial Japanese Government to recognize the independent state of Manchukuo.¹⁴

Thus began a slow but progressive assault on the Imperial Japanese Government by the military, an assault whose roots reach back to early in the century. The replacement of autocracy in Europe following World War I with sweeping tides of democracy, socialism and communism, had profound effects on the Japanese youth at that time. Already disillusioned with the government, nationalistic organizations emerged whose leaders exposed the destructive examples of the West and exposed the nation’s intentions of following them. Calling for Japan to ascend to a position where it would “dominate all other nations of the world,” millions of impressionable, idealistic young men, already disenfranchised by government corruption and greed, had no outlet.¹⁵ For many, especially the peasantry, the military served their needs. There, they become more aware of the nation’s growing despondency. Coupled with the October 1929 collapse on Wall Street, the Japanese Army became even more convinced that Japan’s political and economic destinies no longer resided within its borders. Foreign conquest would now be the engine driving economic progress.

Preceding this were insurmountable economic obstacles, which Japan perceived amounted to attacks on national security and threats to national existence. The Great War’s debts and reparations took enormous tolls on national economies and high export and import

tariffs were put in place to protect domestic production and farming. For an industrialized, export-oriented economy like Japan, a decline in world trade meant disaster. Owing largely to discriminatory trading practices by the West, access to markets in the Philippines, Indo-China, Borneo, Indonesia, Malaya, and Burma were essentially forbidden. The infamous Foreign Minister Yosuke Matsuoka eloquently summarized the state of Japanese affairs on 18 September 1931 (just one day prior to the Manchurian Invasion) by stating “we feel suffocated as we observe internal and external situations. What we are seeking is that which is minimal for living beings. In other words, we are seeking to live. We are seeking room that will let us breathe.”¹⁶

Particularly devastating was the Ottawa Conference of 1932, which constructed a closed trading monopoly within the British Commonwealth in response to the global economic depression. As a means to boost revenue and trade within its empire, limited tariffs were imposed within the zone while prohibitively high tariffs were applied to the rest of the world. To promote its own cotton industry, for example, India applied a 75 percent tariff to Japanese goods and 25 percent to the remainder of the Commonwealth. The United States followed suit and instituted tariffs on imported Japanese goods that routinely exceeded 100 percent.¹⁷ Likewise, Great Britain and the Netherlands controlled the preponderance of the world’s supply of iron, oil, rubber, and tin.¹⁸ Ottawa, the United States, and those wishing to remain in the West’s favor, dealt a crushing blow to Japan.

Larger than California, Oregon, and Washington combined, Manchukuo was believed to be “the only escape from economic strangulation.”¹⁹ Its resource-rich, undeveloped expanses were seen to be the answer to the crushing poverty, overpopulation, and unemployment the nation was suffering from, “where two thirds of all farms were smaller than two and a quarter acres.”²⁰

More importantly, the acquisition of Manchukuo placed Japan on a path of self-sufficiency; the premise on which their continued aggression and ignorance to global pressures would be based. Arnold J. Toynbee noted, “Poor as Japan was in minerals, her economic interests in Manchuria were not superfluities but vital necessities of her international life. . . The international position of Japan – with Nationalist China, Soviet Russia, and the race-conscious English-speaking peoples . . . closing in upon her – had suddenly become precarious again.”²¹ By the end of July 1937, however, the economic miracle of Manchukuo was fading and replaced with an exhausting eight-year war.

Japan’s hope of extending a peaceful coalition with Manchukuo and China deeper into Southeast Asia evaporated on 8 July 1937 when zealous generals escalated the Marco Polo Bridge Incident into what came to be known as the China Incident. The Marco Polo Bridge Incident, a relatively minor skirmish between Chinese Nationalists and Japanese forces near Peking, provided the spark Japanese expansionists needed to deploy more troops into Manchukuo to “protect Japanese lives and property.”²² After several small clashes in the weeks following, Emperor Hirohito authorized a decisive battle intended to punish the Chinese army and stabilize the industry rich Peking-Tientsin region. Victory over a fragmented China (which had been in the midst of a civil war between nationalist and communist powers) was expected to occur rapidly. Despite holding principal cities, ports, railways, and waterways of China, victory eluded Japan and fighting continued through 1945.²³

Imperial Japan’s invasion of China in July 1937 brought global condemnation and prompted President Franklin D. Roosevelt to deliver a prophetic speech on 5 October. Equating Japan to “an epidemic of physical disease,” President Roosevelt began focusing the global community’s attention towards “quarantining” the Japanese threat through coordinated action.²⁴

Over the next four years, a series of perceived aggressions by Japan (e.g., Entering northern Indo-China [23 September 1940], signing the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy [27 September 1940], and the continuance of aggressions against China) were countered with economic sanctions and intensifying distrust.

By 1939, the reality of Japan's continental adventure was unmasking itself. Despite the very real wealth of Manchuria and China, the resources and markets were still merely potential and not yet tangible. The exhaustion of building heavy industry (to include military armaments), financing the development of the economic infrastructure necessary to exploit Manchuria, and waging war against China was having devastating effects. Likewise, the foreign powers, which closed off markets and sources of supply for Japan in the early 1930s in response to their own national economic needs, were, by 1939, choking Japan's lifelines as a result of Japan's widening hostilities.

Japan's geographic and economic isolation afforded no means of absorbing such serious economic, territorial, and, now, political shortcomings. Even before the outbreak of war with China, Japan recognized the situation for what it was; an existential threat. She would have to decide to exist according to Western practices or she would have to forcibly carve out a means for survival. Although references to a self-sufficiency sphere exist prior to 1940, it was not until Foreign Minister Arita Hachiro's proposal of a new vision for East Asia, did the international community recognize Japan's motives and desperation. In a radio address entitled, *The International Situation and Japan's Position*, he announced intentions of establishing the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere; the uniting of Asian nations "on the basis of common existence" to include China, the Philippines, Manchukuo, French Indo-China and the Dutch East Indies.²⁵ In reality, this proclamation was not the reciprocal partnership of *Hakko Ichiu* (i.e., universal

brotherhood) or altruism.²⁶ As outlined as an “Objective of War” on 5 November 1941, it was a means for continued Japanese existence.²⁷

The “quarantine” of Japan by the United States, Great Britain, and the Netherlands began in earnest just prior to Foreign Minister Hachiro’s address after the fall of France on 17 June 1940. From this came an embargo on high-grade scrap iron and aviation gasoline to Japan.²⁸ This was extended to all scrap metal on 27 September, due to Japan’s occupation of northern Indo-China (a move meant to stop the backdoor flow of supplies to Chiang Kai-shek) and signing of the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy.²⁹ The occupation was perceived by the Allies as a serious threat to Singapore, the Philippines, and the Dutch East Indies, and signaled that Japan intended to include these within its co-prosperity sphere.

Signing of the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy confirmed two critical suspicions in the minds of the West; Japan had intentions of regional domination, and viewed armed conflict with the United States as inevitable. Japan’s intention of preventing the United States from concentrating forces is easily discerned as Article 3 of the Pact states “these countries shall pledge themselves to take every political, economic and military measure to assist each other when any one of the signatories is attacked by a country not participating in the European War or in the China Incident.” Given that the Soviet Union was specifically excluded in Article 5, it is evident that the above passage was directed at the United States.³⁰

Ten months later, on 26-27 July 1941, the United States, Great Britain, and the Netherlands unleashed another round of powerful sanctions resulting from Japan’s incursion into southern Indo-China, which, correctly deduced, was the staging of forces for the seizure of Malaya and the Dutch East Indies. The Netherlands refused to supply Japan with oil and Great Britain and the United States froze all Japanese assets within their jurisdictions.³¹ The United

States also brought all Japanese import and export transactions under government control.³² The confluence of these sanctions placed Japan's defense in a perilous situation. Japan had lost all means of obtaining the liquid fuel and oil indispensable to a modern state. With no available and sustainable alternatives, the Imperial Japanese Navy would be entirely disabled in two years and industries reliant on liquid fuel and oil would cease functioning in a year.³³

By September 1941, Japan was reduced to requisitioning materials solely from within its "self-supporting sphere," which included Manchuria, occupied portions of China, French Indo-China, and Thailand; all of which were under the influence of the Japanese military. This fell far short of anticipated civilian and military needs, leading to the identification of Japan's "first sphere of supply." This included the Philippines, Borneo, Dutch East Indies, Malaya, French Indo-China and Thailand. Later identified as the Southern Area, this was Japan's final means for survival; the area from which nothing short of forcible subjugation could they prevent extinction.³⁴

A report by Lieutenant General Suzuki Teiichi, President of the Cabinet Planning Board, on 29 July 1941 articulated the desperation of Japan's national material strength and potential for culmination. His examination of consumption rates against current stockpiles showed that it was nearly impossible to maintain the status quo through increased production. Unless fresh supplies were produced, strategically important materials such as heavy oil, machine oil, aviation gasoline, and ore would be exhausted within 2-4 months of hostilities beginning with the United States. To prevent this, he outlined two requirements. First, to wage a protracted war, the intact capture of the Southern Area must occur at the outset of war and exploitation of its resources must begin immediately. Second, command of the sea-lanes and air space must be gained and maintained to transport the resources to the homeland and between the controlled areas.³⁵

After years of material, political, and economic isolation from the United States, Great Britain, and the Netherlands, Japan faced a climactic deterioration of means, which, by mid-1941, threatened national existence. By November 1941, Japan believed the economic severance would yield greater hardships amongst its people than military conflict. Hope for a negotiated settlement and collective appeasement with the West was believed to be lost. The Imperial Japanese Government ultimately hinged salvation on waging total war for the sake of self-preservation and self-defense. Nothing short of the complete mobilization of people and resources would give Japan a reasonable chance at avoiding a “subcontractor” existence to America’s emerging special interests in the Far East. Japan’s hope for securing its self-sufficiency sphere rested in a German victory in Europe and a weary American public that chose to negotiate for peace over an enduring war. The unacceptable alternative was continued Anglo encroachment and marginalization in a sphere of influence for which Japan intended to be the nucleus and greatest benefactor.

If preservation and sustainment of the nation was Imperial Japan’s ultimate objective, why did Japan elect aggression over appeasement; especially as the economic and military weight of other world powers outlined a very distressing future? Many historians place blame on the insanity and blind ambition of the Imperial Japanese Government (namely, the military apparatus). Reality, however, was much different. After 1939, the altruistic uniting of nations under the banner of the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere was failing and its inherent self-sufficiency and self-defense were swiftly evaporating. Imperial Japan no longer believed that rationality (i.e., their interpretation of rationality) could acquire the fundamental resources of territory, food, and raw materials necessary to prevent extinction. They believed that their only alternative rested with subjecting themselves to the intentions, decisions, and interests of the

Occidentals; the alliance they believed manipulated them onto this course. Preventing the eradication of national identity, infection of Anglo genetic material into its pedigree, and usurpation of its own Manifest Destiny, was the virtuous cause for which Imperial Japan would go to war.

The idea of entering into a situation where existence is at stake is not foreign. In fact, it oftentimes provides the impetus for unparalleled mobilization and success. On the eve of the Battle of Cannae, the Roman Consul Aemilius addressed his legions with “Men who like you are fighting for country, wives and children . . . Enter upon this battle with the full conviction that in it your country is not risking a certain number of legions, but her bare existence.”³⁶

How then was the Imperial Japanese Government, which by the late 1930s was dominated and manipulated by the military, able to mobilize a nation for this ill-fated, yet great, cause? The fundamental answer lies in the extreme nationalism that emanated from the Meiji Restoration. Arnold Toynbee eloquently captures the mood of the ruling militarists leading to the fateful decision:

If no empty lands of suitable climate were left for Japan to colonize, and if the alternative expedient of building up industries on the basis of international trade were at the mercy of disturbing forces outside Japanese control, no course remained open for Japan except to conquer for herself a domain, providing the necessary raw materials and markets in the necessary quantities, which Japan could exploit economically, regardless of what might happen in the world outside the limits of her co-prosperity sphere.³⁷

Understanding how the Japanese could rationalize what they did requires the application of two very important and complementary biological and social adaptability models; the Inclusive Fitness Logic and the Adaptive Infrastructure model. Directing these theories to the origins of Imperial Japan’s extreme nationalism provides a deeper understanding of not only the pressures experienced by the Imperial Japanese Government, but also the decision to go to war.

William Donald Hamilton, an evolutionary biologist, argues that “genetic fitness” (i.e., the reproductive success of an individual usually measured as the number of offspring produced that survive to reproductive age) has two basic components.³⁸ First, is the traditional Darwinian understanding of increased personal survival and personal reproduction. Second, is a kinship component that measures the ability to enhance the reproduction of close relatives who share the same genes by common descent. Hamilton joined these components to formalize the term “Inclusive Fitness.” This is a person’s total impact on evolution, which consists of his or her personal fitness and a kinship factor. It is this latter component that will largely shape the argument for Imperial Japan’s conclusions.³⁹

Evolutionary success, therefore, depends largely on fostering nepotism to protect a society’s Inclusive Fitness. In Japan’s case, it means protecting its genetic integrity through the Identification Mechanism, which is a subset of Inclusive Fitness. The Identification Mechanism is not an evolutionary genetic mechanism devoid of personal decision-making and interests. Instead, it is the interfacing of genes and culture that are difficult to calculate. Their collision helps explain how individuals determine their preferred group; the one “that best offers and protects one’s inclusive fitness.”⁴⁰

The Identification Mechanism is strongest amongst naturally cohesive groups that share five distinct markers; commonality in phenotype (similarity in appearance), descent, language, homeland, and religion.⁴¹ Japan was exceptionally united in all of them. No ambiguity existed as to where the Japanese homeland was. They shared the same language; the majority shared the same religion; and they were all physically similar. In fact, the length and extent of Japan’s historical geographic isolation allowed for unparalleled cultural continuity through the mid-nineteenth century. There are still only three small out-groups residing in Japan; the Ainu, the

Barakumin, and the Koreans. This leaves Japan as one of the most homogeneous cultural and ethnic groups in the world.⁴²

The cultural fusion of these markers personified itself in that of the Emperor and his divinity. At the time of World War II, Emperor Hirohito's genealogy could be traced back sixty-nine generations to the first Japanese Emperor, Jimmu.⁴³ Building on early myths regarding divine origin and the people's descentance from him, Japan came to believe in the Emperor as a mortal God. This powerful mixture of divine origin and congruence of the Identification Markers created a nation that viewed itself as a suprafamily and allowed Inclusive Fitness Logic to operate with great impunity.⁴⁴

The unconditional sacrifice, and promotion of Inclusive Fitness Logic, is no more apparent than in the complete mobilization of society to succeed in the era of modernization and global competition. With over half of all Japanese expenditures between the Meiji Restoration and World War II spent on military manpower, machinery, and technology, a heavy burden was placed on the Japanese people. With little objection, however, and respect for their hierarchical position, the Japanese people transformed their society into a prosperous, expansionist nation despite the severe strain levied upon them.⁴⁵

The above commonalities play a significant role in a group's propensity for warfare as they transfer their innate allegiances and self-sacrificial behaviors from their nucleus ethnic groups to larger groups. Likewise, they perpetuate an in-group amity (i.e., peaceful relations) and promote out-group enmity (i.e., hostility). When, as is the case of Japan, the Identification Mechanism operated amongst a homogenous cultural ethnic group and personal and national interests were easily aligned, strong nationalism followed. The promotion of hostility towards

the larger group (i.e., the West) thus made mobilization relatively simple. The nation's tolerance and endurance necessary for such a war were also just as easily shaped by these commonalities.⁴⁶

A complementary component to the genesis and degree of Japanese nationalism is the sociocultural Adaptive Infrastructure model. This model's underlying purpose is to identify why some cultures persist and others die out in response to stress. Imperial Japan suffered a deprivative form of stress that shifted access and availability of fundamental resources away with the high expectation that this pattern would continue to repeat itself without significant interruption.⁴⁷ As was seen with Japan's opening to the outside world in 1853, the cycle of the West imposing its own interests into the Far East was nearing the century mark when Japan decided that this intrusion could no longer continue. Adaptability, when presented with a crisis, is thus largely regulated by a society's means for getting "people to resources and resources to people, for allocating power and managing constituencies in tasks requiring concerted action" as well as perpetuating alliances and stabilizing themselves in their geographic and political environments. The actions generated to meet these requirements derive from the economic, political, social, ideological domains of the society's adaptive infrastructure.⁴⁸

The Economic Domain was, arguably, the single most important driving factor in Japan's decision for war. As the means a population has for provisioning itself through production, distribution and consumption of basic resources, this domain was under direct assault by the West for nearly twenty years before the outbreak of World War II. There is no shortage of examples that highlight how tight the economic noose was around Japan by the end of 1941. Theoretical alternatives to Japan's plight include cultivating resource alternatives within their own territory and stockpiling of basic materials within the limits of their technological capacity. Cultivation proved to be a failure as Manchuria required an exorbitant amount of economic and

infrastructure investment that Japan could not shoulder alone. Stockpiling also proved ineffective although the Japanese government made significant attempts from 1940-41, as it became more apparent that the Western powers were eventually going to cut all economic ties. This alleviated very little pressure. Their only acceptable alternative proved to be the creation of the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere. Within four months of the attack on Pearl Harbor, this was established and generating the necessary materials to not only continue the war but provide for the homeland.⁴⁹ The situation against the Allies, however, proved far less effective.

The Social Domain can be operationally defined as the network of interpersonal relationships in which strategic goods and services – those required for survival – flow. It is not the goods and services themselves. Rather, it is mechanisms by which they are secured from others. Japan was inextricably linked to trade with external partners as a means for securing goods and services. In 1937, for example, 29.3 percent of Japan's national income was reliant on imports; highest amongst the world's great powers (Japan, Great Britain, Italy, France, Germany, the United States, and Russia) and fifteen percent higher than the next closest power.⁵⁰ Another stark example of the changing tides of Japanese economic relationships was the negative trend in trade between external partners and solely from within its exclusive economic bloc (i.e., Korea, Formosa, Kwantung, and Manchuria). Between 1929 and 1938, imports from this bloc rose twenty-one percent while exports to this bloc dropped by thirty-one percent, showing its growing dependency on these areas as the well of markets and trading partners dried up.⁵¹

At the onset of deprivative conditions, especially those expected to be severe and prolonged, it is the political domain that is expected to develop and institute the coping mechanisms.⁵² Limitations to the means by which leaders end the deprivative phase are largely unregulated given they do not escalate the situation. Aligning with the Allies during World War

I; Signing of the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy in September 1940; and stationing forces in Indo-China to prevent the backdoor flow of supplies to Chiang Kai-shek, were all political moves meant to alleviate Japan's deteriorating situation. None, however, may have been more damaging (in the long run) than forcible seizure of Manchuria in September 1931. Inspired by two Kwantung Army officers (Colonel Seishiro Itagaki and Lieutenant Colonel Kanji Ishiwara), seizure of this vast wilderness of potential self-sufficiency proved to be a fatal step from which Japan could not retrench. It led to fractures in the government, militarization, and, ultimately, to a war that became a matter of necessity rather than choice.⁵³

Of the four domains, the Ideological Domain has the greatest overlap between the sociocultural Adaptive Infrastructure model and the biological Inclusive Fitness Logic. This domain consists of "all rational formulae, affective states, symbols, meanings and behaviors that define, reify, or otherwise reinforce the place actors perceive themselves to occupy in their universe of natural and supernatural forces."⁵⁴ When war broke out in Europe in September 1939, Japanese leadership recognized an opportunity to break out of the stalemate in China and exploit the vulnerable European colonial territories. Foreign Minister Arita Harchiro's radio address (as mentioned above) highlighted what Japan envisioned the world to be; large regional blocks dominated by Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, and the United States. Ideology (namely Japan's anticipated global station), thus became the basis for the assertion of its co-prosperity sphere:

Japan's ideal since the foundation of the empire has been that all nations should be enabled to find their proper places in the world. Our foreign policy has also been based upon this ideal, for which we have not hesitated at times even to fight by staking our national existence . . . In order to realize such a high ideal, therefore, it seems to be a most natural step that peoples who are closely related with one another geographically, racially, culturally, and economically should first form a sphere of their own for coexistence and co-prosperity . . . It is in this spirit that Japan is now engaged in the task of establishing a new order in East

Asia . . . The countries of East Asia and the regions of the South Seas are geographically, historically, racially, and economically very closely related to each other. . . The uniting of all these regions under a single sphere on the basis of common existence and insuring thereby the stability of that sphere is, I think, a natural conclusion.⁵⁵

Woven throughout this declaration are hints at both the spiritual and protectorate responsibilities Japan believed warranted such extreme measures. Ideologically, they did not see any difference between their actions and those of the other world powers. The world's xenophobia, as they saw it, was carving out their rightful place and Japan could either stake and defend its claim or be absorbed and become nothing more than a pawn.

Nationalism thus serves as the binding thread between the sociocultural and biological preservation models presented. In Imperial Japan's case, it shows how, consciously or not, it balanced natural evolutionary preservation tendencies against the evolving international economic and political landscapes. Genuine nationalism, arising when a cultural ethnic group mobilizes to found its own independent nation-state, occurs when a cultural ethnic group resists conquest by other groups or breaks away from imposed political boundaries.⁵⁶ Japan did both. Although one could argue that Japan was already a nation-state, a more inclusive definition, based on Foreign Minister Harchiro's proclamation, clearly shows that Japan's intentions extended well beyond their own borders. Additionally, Japan ultimately settled for war because the alternative meant imminent economic, cultural, and political suppression at the hands of the United States.

Arguably, Imperial Japan's motives and mechanisms for attaining self-sufficiency and self-defense were, within their historical and predictable context, legitimate and warranted. Although imperialism invokes negative images of enslavement, unwarranted persecution, and masses of dislocated persons, a Japanese delegate to the 1936 conference of the Institute of

Pacific Relations summed up his nation's position on the subject with indisputable historical precedence; "Japan has a legitimate desire to expand. What are the means by which a nation can legitimately expand? The average reasoning of the Japanese people is that Great Britain and the other Western powers have done it [Imperialism], so why shouldn't we?"⁵⁷ Extraordinary identification with the nation as an extension of oneself and family presented the world with a proletariat willfully embracing complete societal militarization, national expansionist policies, and self-sacrifice, climaxing with kamikaze-like behavior.

To the naïve, uneducated outside world, Imperial Japan's dire economic, material, and political situation immediately before World War II was one of complete irony. Driving a nation to war against the world's superpowers, based solely off their ideological and political creeds, was incalculable and preposterous. Weighing her ability to wage war in the form and duration it would most likely assume, as well as bringing the whole of East Asia and the South Pacific under her sphere of control was more than simply a difficult task. It was impossible and proved to be so. Yet, Imperial Japan ignored facts, figures, and estimates. It discounted the on-going purging of materials and bloodletting already in motion in China. Instead, divinity and nationalism, something devoid in most other nations on the eve of war, drove Imperial Japan. By December 1941, there was no acceptable alternative. To the orthodox, reverent-minded Japanese, the war was merely the beginning to what would eventually lead Imperial Japan to the world's throne.

Modern-day strategists could easily dismiss this study as a historical anomaly whose replication is easily recognized and avoided. Advanced monitoring technologies and extensive global alliances would arguably prevent a similar level of escalation and surprise as witnessed in December 1941. This would be accurate if one was narrowly searching for the same geopolitical

paradigm as Imperial Japan found itself in during the first half of the twentieth century. Several comparable situations currently exist where the desperation experienced from increased economic and political isolation could thrust a nation towards seemingly irrational confrontation. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the People's Republic of China are logical choices. To varying degrees, they pose considerable military and economic threats within their regions and potentially beyond. In the near term, however, these are less potent and destabilizing than the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Little doubt exists that Imperial Japan was driven to war by its impending economic and material isolation. Iran is experiencing similar international isolation as a result of its sponsorship and promotion of terrorism; refusal to verifiably confine its nuclear programs to solely peaceful purposes; and overt threats towards the State of Israel. Like Imperial Japan's situation, its isolation is influenced through the broad application of sanctions championed by the United States and aimed at reducing its capacity to wage war. Likewise, other democratic nations and institutions such as the European Union (EU) and the United Nations also see Iran as a regional destabilizer and largely endorse these sanctions. Their collaboration is slowly strangling Iran of critical resources and options.

The most damaging sanctions apply to Iran's oil export and gasoline production capability, which provides approximately seventy percent of the government's revenues. As a result of these sanctions oil exports declined by half (2.5 million barrels per day to 1.34 million barrels per day) from 2011 to 2012. This dramatic drop was largely due to the EU's embargo on Iranian crude oil taking full effect on 1 July 2012. Other countries such as China, Japan, South Korea, and Turkey matched these sanctions, recognizing that their strategic, long-term interests rest in strong relations with the United States and the EU.⁵⁸

Potentially more damaging are the sanctions the United States places against countries that do business with Iran. Since 1996, the United States has used the Iran Sanctions Act (ISA) to force foreign energy firms to choose between freely participating in the U.S. market or in markets with direct and indirect ties to Iran.⁵⁹ Violating the ISA comes in the form of: “purchasing oil or other petroleum products from Iran; conducting transactions with the National Iranian Oil Company; or purchasing petrochemical products from Iran.”⁶⁰ As per the House of Representatives Bill 1905 signed on 11 May 2011, penalties against these countries and businesses require the imposition of five out of twelve available sanctions. These sanctions are broad and include: denial of U.S. bank loans, denial of licenses for the U.S. export of military technology, prohibitions in transactions in foreign exchange, and restriction on imports from the sanctioned entity.⁶¹ Clearly, the U.S. is just as interested at deterring economic ambitions of the global community with Iran as it is in severely diminishing the means Iran has to sustain itself.

The extreme confluence of geopolitical, economic, and adaptive infrastructure factors that thrust Japan into war may never exist again. Iran does not pose the same climactic threat to the United States as Imperial Japan did in the 1940's, but it does possess the influence, desperation, and weaponry to escalate conditions in an already unstable region where strategic U.S. interests and allies are firmly rooted. Global leadership can ill afford to use Imperial Japan as the litmus test for fanatical behavior. They should, however, recognize that as the window for global concessions closes and the economic noose tightens around ostracized nations, it is not without reason or precedent that a nonsensical, catastrophic option may be deemed as the only logical means for securing a desired future.

NOTES

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- ² Arnold J. Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs, 1926*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), 385.
- ³ W. G. Beasley, *Japanese Imperialism, 1894-1945*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 142-143.
- ⁴ Beasley, 131.
- ⁵ A. M. Carr-Saunders, *World Population*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press for Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1936), 261.
- ⁶ League of Nations: *Statistical Year Book 1939/40* (Geneva, League of Nations Publications, 1940), 13-16 & 21. <http://digital.library.northwestern.edu/league/le0277aa.pdf> (accessed January 18, 2013).
- ⁷ John Toland, *The Rising Sun: The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire, 1936-1945* (New York: Random House, 1970), 5.
- ⁸ Beasley, 167.
- ⁹ Noam Chomsky, *American Power and the New Mandarins*. (New York: Random House, Inc, 1967), 171.
- ¹⁰ Nish, 142.
- ¹¹ Raymond A. Esthus, "The Changing Concept of the Open Door, 1899-1910," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 60, no. 3 (Dec., 1959): 436-437, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1892268>.
- ¹² Beasley, 167.
- ¹³ Chomsky, 173.
- ¹⁴ Chomsky, 176.
- ¹⁵ Toland, 5.
- ¹⁶ Sadako N. Ogata, *Defiance in Manchuria: The Making of Japanese Foreign Policy, 1931-1932*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 35.
- ¹⁷ Chomsky, 191.
- ¹⁸ Chomsky, 190.
- ¹⁹ Chomsky, 189.
- ²⁰ Toland, 6.
- ²¹ Toynbee (1926), 386.
- ²² Herbert P. Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc, 2000), 318.
- ²³ Beasley, 203.
- ²⁴ Toland, 43.
- ²⁵ Yong-Ho (COL) Ch'Oe and William Theodore De Bary, ed., *Sources of East Asian Tradition; Volume Two, The Modern Period*, vol. 2 (New York, Columbia University Press, 2008), 622.
- ²⁶ "The Complete History of the Greater East Asia War," 1953, Headquarters, 500th Military Intelligence Service Group, volume 1, pg 31.
- ²⁷ Ch'Oe and De Bary, 283.
- ²⁸ Ronald H. Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun: The American War with Japan*, ed. Louis Morton (New York: The Free Press, 1985), 64.
- ²⁹ "Political Strategy Prior to Outbreak of War, Part II," 1952, Headquarters, Army Forces Far East, Military History Section, Library of the Marine Corps, Quantico, Japanese Monographs, No. 146, timeline.

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- ³⁰ Japanese Monographs, No. 146, Appendix 4, pg 51
- ³¹ “Political Strategy Prior to Outbreak of War, Part III,” 1952, Headquarters, Army Forces Far East, Military History Section, Library of the Marine Corps, Quantico, Japanese Monographs, No. 147, pg 43-44.
- ³² Bix, 400-401.
- ³³ “The Complete History of the Greater East Asia War”, 166.
- ³⁴ “Political Strategy Prior to Outbreak of War, Part IV,” 1952, Headquarters, Army Forces Far East, Military History Section, Library of the Marine Corps, Quantico, Japanese Monographs, No. 150, Appendix 1, pg 72.
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- ³⁶ R. Raul Shaw and Yuwa Wong, *Genetic Seeds of Warfare: Evolution, Nationalism, and Patriotism*. (Winchester: Unwin Hyman, Inc., 1989), 137.
- ³⁷ Arnold J. Toynbee, ed., *Survey of International Affairs, 1939-1946: The World in March 1939*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 118.
- ³⁸ *The American Heritage Medical Dictionary*, Revised ed., s.v. “reference.”
- ³⁹ Shaw and Wong, 26.
- ⁴⁰ Shaw and Wong, 92.
- ⁴¹ Shaw and Wong, 110.
- ⁴² Shaw and Wong, 144.
- ⁴³ Shaw and Wong, 145.
- ⁴⁴ Shaw and Wong, 143.
- ⁴⁵ Shaw and Wong, 144.
- ⁴⁶ Shaw and Wong, 110.
- ⁴⁷ Charles D. Laughlin Jr. and Ivan A. Brady, ed., *Extinction and Survival in Human Populations* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1978), 18.
- ⁴⁸ Laughlin Jr. and Brady, 7-8.
- ⁴⁹ Laughlin Jr. and Brady, 8.
- ⁵⁰ Toynbee (1939-1946), 483.
- ⁵¹ Toynbee (1939-1946), 486.
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- ⁵³ Toland, 6.
- ⁵⁴ Laughlin Jr. and Brady, 13.
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- ⁵⁶ Shaw and Wong, 138.
- ⁵⁷ Chomsky, 173.
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- ⁵⁹ Congressional Research Service, 1.
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